

-Freshman's First Bill to Pass House Protects Benefits for 3 Million Vets- Washington, DC —

Congressman John Hall, a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, has introduced legislation that is slated for floor action today in the House of Representatives. His bill, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (H.R.1284), will increase veterans' pension and compensation payments this year. This will be the first bill introduced by Hall to pass the House of Representatives since he became a Congressman in January. After passage by the House, the bill will go to the U.S. Senate for further action.

This legislation and two other new bills Hall has co-sponsored—the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide prevention Act (H.R. 327) and the Dr. James Allen Veterans Vision Equity Act (H.R. 797)—are expected to pass the House and move to the Senate for further consideration.

"Together, these new bills reaffirm the intention of Congress to care and provide for the needs of America's veterans and their families," said Hall, Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. "We must uphold our nation's commitments to veterans, and I am pleased that the House is acting to prevent inflation from eroding the purchasing power of millions of veterans and their dependents."

H.R.1284 would provide a cost-of-living adjustment to the rates of disability compensation provided to our nation's disabled veterans, their dependents and survivors. Without this bill, payments would not keep up with rising living costs resulting from inflation. The new COLA bill will provide disability compensation to 3,220,031 veterans with service-connected disabilities in fiscal year 2008.

The Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 327) - named after an Iraq veteran from Iowa who committed suicide because of PTSD – will improve the VA's ability to diagnose and treat veterans who seem at risk. It will also give veterans who feel suicidal better options to reach out to the VA for assistance and improve VA response.

At a hearing of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in Washington on March 13, Chairman Hall heard the testimony of Jon Soltz, an Iraq war veteran who said suicide among Iraq war veterans is a serious problem and a largely unseen cost of the war Iraq. Further, there has been recent news coverage of an Iraq war veteran who committed suicide in Minnesota after being turned away for treatment from the VA.

"It is unacceptable for any veteran who feels suicidal to be turned away from the VA," said Hall. "Veterans continue to be affected by their combat experiences and deserve immediate, skillful care and treatment. The VA has failed to plan for the extended costs of the war in Iraq and Congress is forced to act to improve care for veterans."

The Dr. James Allen Veterans Vision Equity Act (H.R. 797) increases benefits for veterans who are blinded while serving in the Armed Forces. Rep. Hall is a co-sponsor of the legislation, and the bill passed first in his subcommittee.

"This bill upgrades the VA standard to what the rest of the Federal government considers vision

loss and disability,” said Hall. “Our veterans deserve no less.”